New People in the New South
An Overview of Southern Immigration
by Carl L. Bankston III

New York, Chicago, and San Francisco are fixed in our imaginations as the great American immigrant settlements. Until recently, most people rarely considered the U.S. South when they thought of new arrivals from other countries. For much of American history the South had very few foreign-born people, and from 1850 to 1970, it was home to a smaller percentage of immigrants than any other region (see Figure 1). Even during the great period of migration from 1880 to 1920, a time when massive waves of newcomers arrived on American shores, only about 2.5 percent of the people in the southern states were foreign-born. After 1970, however, the proportion of southerners who were immigrants began to increase sharply. By 1990 the South had a greater percentage of immigrants than the Midwest, and although the West had become the primary immigrant destination by the end of the twentieth century, its rate of proportional increase had begun to level off somewhat by the early twenty-first century, while the immigrant portion of the South continued to grow. Even the gap between the South and the Northeast, the old immigrant center of the United States, had begun to narrow in the early 2000s.

The primary reason for the South’s increase in immigration is economic opportunity, a fundamental motivation for migration. Long existing in pockets of
The making of a global South is a relatively new phenomenon, yet these dynamics that drive recent immigration to the region have deep historical roots. There is continuity, as well as change, in the integration of the South into a more closely interconnected world. Immigration early in the South’s history was a product of the same social and economic forces that have fostered the more recent immigration to the region.

The Old South

In 1850 Louisiana had the largest concentration of immigrants in the South, about 75,000 people and approximately one-quarter of Louisiana’s free population. New Orleans, the largest port in the South and the second largest in the nation after New York, was a natural point of entry for people from other countries. Between 1820 and 1860, over half a million immigrants arrived in Louisiana. Given Louisiana’s French history and the large French-speaking population in the state during the nineteenth century, it is easy to assume that France would be the

![Figure 1. Percentage of People in the Regions of the United States Who Were Foreign-Born, 1850–2005](image-url)
place of origin for most of the state’s foreign-born residents. Many immigrants to Louisiana were, in fact, from France. About 15,000 people in Louisiana in 1850, or one out of five immigrants in the state, gave France as their birthplace. The largest immigrant group in Louisiana, though, came from Ireland. An estimated 26,580 Louisianans, or nearly 38 percent of the state’s immigrants, were born in Ireland in 1850. The Irish are generally described as having arrived in Louisiana in two waves. Those known as the “Old Irish” came primarily from the northern part of Ireland between 1803 and 1850. These earlier immigrants became part of the middle classes of New Orleans. The “New Irish,” consisting mainly of peasants, left their homes because of poverty and famine, particularly after the potato blight, which hit Ireland about 1845 and lasted into the following decade, leaving Ireland devastated. They settled in the area known as the City of Lafayette, which was later incorporated into New Orleans and is still identified as the Irish Channel. The New Irish provided much of New Orleans’s low-paying manual labor.

Germans made up the second largest immigrant nationality in antebellum Louisiana. Over 20,000 people in the state in 1850, or 28 percent of all immigrants, had been born in Germany. Germans first arrived at the port of New Orleans when Louisiana was a French colony. Many settled just north of New Orleans in the Parishes of St. John and St. Charles, in an area known as the Côte des Allemands, or German Coast. A second wave of peasant German workers followed the first wave of German settlers between 1820 and 1850.

With the Civil War Louisiana ceased to be the immigrant center that it had been in earlier years. By 1900 only about 4 percent of Louisiana’s total population and 7 percent of its white population were foreign born. A little over half of these Louisiana immigrants came from Italy and Germany. The Italians’s small grocery stores and restaurants left a particularly noticeable mark on New Orleans, as did the high representation of their second and third generations in public service during the twentieth century.

The number of immigrants to Louisiana declined, both in real numbers and as a proportion of the state’s population, throughout the period of booming immigration in the industrial North. In 1910 Louisiana had approximately 54,600 foreign-born people, or just over 3 percent of the state’s population. Ten years later, this number had dropped by about 4,000 individuals to just under 3 percent of the population. By 1930 fewer than 2 percent of Louisianans were foreign born.

Next to Louisiana, Texas and Maryland were the southern states that had the largest percentage of immigrants before the Civil War. One in ten Texans was foreign born in 1850. Over two-thirds (69 percent) of these Texas immigrants came from Germany. “German Texas” began to take root at the beginning of the 1830s when Johann Friedrich Ernst arrived in New Orleans from Oldenburg in northwestern Germany and learned that land was available in Texas. Ernst obtained a
land grant, and his publicity efforts set off a growing migration trend that resulted in a German settlement belt through the southeast area of the state.6

Between 1850 and 1900, the German-born population of Texas grew from just under 11,000 to about 49,000. The German-culture population of Texas was much larger; German continued to be a dominant language among many American-born, second- and third-generation German Americans in southeast Texas. During this same period, however, Mexico had become the main source of immigration to the Lone Star State. Mexican immigrants had grown from 22 percent of foreign-born Texans in 1850 to 40 percent in 1900, when Texas became home to about 75,000 Mexicans. Before the beginning of the twentieth century, then, Texas had already begun the shift from European to Mexican immigration that would play a major part in the globalization of the South in the late twentieth century.7

The stream of Mexicans to Texas began to flow more rapidly in the early twentieth century as a result of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. At that time about 246,500 people in Texas were foreign-born, or just over 6 percent of the state’s population. By 1930 this number had grown to about 437,000, or nearly 8 percent of the population. The number of native-born children of immigrants grew from 6 percent of Texans in 1900 to 8 percent in 1930. Over half of all foreign-born Texans came from Mexico in 1910. This percentage grew to 69 percent by 1920 and to 77 percent by 1930, when Texas was home to over a third of a million people who had been born in Mexico. The number of native-born Texans whose fathers had been born in Mexico grew from 224,000 in 1910 (just under 6 percent of the state’s population) to 662,000 in 1930 (about 12 percent). By the end of Mexico’s revolutionary years, nearly one out of every five Texans was either of Mexican birth or was the child of a Mexican-born father.

Despite Texas’s status as a northern part of Mexico until the Mexican-American War, people of Spanish-speaking origin made up a relatively small percentage of all Texans in 1910: slightly over 3 percent of Texans listed in the U.S. Census had Spanish surnames, and the same percentage gave their “mother tongue” as Spanish. Twenty years later, 10 percent had a Spanish surname and 6 percent identified Spanish as their native language. Largely as a result of this new flow of Mexicans across the border, Texas had the largest number of foreign-born people in the South during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Maryland, on the border between the South and the North, was home to an estimated 59,500 immigrants in 1850, nearly 12 percent of the state’s free population and the largest number of foreign-born people in any southern state except Louisiana. In 1850 Maryland’s foreign-born population, like Louisiana’s, was primarily the consequence of mid-nineteenth-century immigration from Germany (55 percent) and Ireland (35 percent). These immigrants were heavily concentrated in
the port city of Baltimore, where Germans had begun to arrive in the eighteenth century. The potato famine of the 1840s stimulated Irish immigration, while railroad work on the Baltimore-based B&O Railroad supported it. Southwest Baltimore, in particular, became an Irish community during the nineteenth century. The B&O Railroad also opened piers for immigration at Locust Point in 1868, making Baltimore a primary point of entry for immigrants to the United States.8

Nineteenth-century immigration to the South, then, was heavily concentrated and tended to arrive through the port cities of New Orleans and Baltimore. Even the Germans who settled in southeast Texas had arrived by way of New Orleans. These pockets of immigration in the South reflected the national origins, chiefly Germany and Ireland, of other nineteenth-century arrivals. Only Texas, with its long border with Mexico, had a large number of people from Latin America.

The pattern of early southern immigration can explain why most southern states were relatively unconnected to global movements until recently, and it can provide a basis for understanding why the South became part of a more globally connected world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. As a settled agricultural region, most of the South had few economic opportunities to offer immigrants. The industrial jobs that drew people from around the world to northern cities in the late 1800s and early 1900s were largely absent from the South, where the economy continued to be dominated by small-scale agriculture.
or by post-Civil War versions of plantation agriculture. New land for farmers was becoming available in the West, not the South, during the 1800s. The one state that did pull in European immigrants, Texas, was the one that overlaps the South and the West, and it attracted German immigrants because of the availability of land. Maryland, a southern boundary state, provided jobs in the railroad industry, creating the infrastructure of the expanding U.S. industrial system.

Immigrants leave homelands, as well as go to host countries, and events shape which original homelands send people to new destinations. The chief southern immigrants from the beginning of the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century were Irish, German, and Mexican. The first two nationalities also made up the largest groups of immigrants in other parts of the United States. Lack of economic opportunity in the homeland and a potato famine concentrated in Ireland that extended to Germany helped to stimulate emigration from these countries in the middle of the nineteenth century. The political and social unrest in Mexico, in the early twentieth century, pushed people into the United States.

Finally, ethnic networks and ethnic communities helped to create the early southern pockets of immigrant settlement. Once German settlers had reached southeastern Texas, other Germans were drawn to the same area because of familiarity of language and culture and because information about opportunities often travels along national or ethnic lines of communication.

While immigrant movement into the new South of the late twentieth century may, on the surface, look like a radical break with the demographic patterns of the old, there is a good deal of continuity. The dynamics of immigration—economic opportunity, geographical access, motivations to leave a homeland, and immigrant communities—continued to operate, shifting to encourage migration to new locations. Texas, as one of North America’s primary points of entry from Mexico, gave early indications of what would become a dominant trend in late twentieth-century immigration.

**Immigration Areas of the New South**

By the end of the twentieth century, the southern states fell roughly into three categories in relation to immigration. Those with the largest foreign populations were the two “access” states, Texas and Florida. These two states, with well over 2.5 million foreign-born residents each in 2000, were points of entry into the United States. Located at the western and eastern edges of the most southern end of the South, these were states of primary migration. Texas simply expanded the role it had played earlier in the century, providing overland access from the south. With the transportation system and widespread economic opportunities of the late twentieth century, though, Texas both drew immigrants from farther south, bringing in increasing numbers of Central Americans, and served as a way station...
in sending immigrants farther north. Florida, taking over the part played by Louisiana in the nineteenth century, received immigrants by sea.

The “opportunity” states, primarily located in the upper South, made up the second category: Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia. Offering jobs in rapidly rising industries, these four states had immigrant populations of around a half-million each. Access, of course, was important to migration to the economic-opportunity states, and Texas and Florida also provided substantial job opportunities to immigrants.9

The final category, the “limited migration” states, are located in the lower or Deep South, with the exception of Arkansas and Tennessee. At least until 2005, these states have continued to have a relatively low immigrant presence by the standards of the late-twentieth-century United States. Even among the limited migration states, though, immigrants have arrived in larger numbers than in earlier years, and new developments, such as the demand for construction workers along the Gulf Coast, could rapidly increase immigration. In Arkansas and Tennessee, the same types of jobs responsible for much higher levels of immigration to Georgia and North Carolina have attracted growing numbers of immigrants, particularly from Mexico and Central America.10

TEXAS AND FLORIDA, ACCESS STATES

Texas not only has the greatest number of immigrants in the South, it is third in the nation as an immigrant state of settlement, after California and New York. In the late twentieth century, Mexico, the source of more immigrants to the United States than any other country, saw more of its residents head north as a consequence of economic problems. Over 70 percent of Mexico’s export revenues came from oil at the beginning of the 1980s. Beginning in about 1982, a decline in the price of oil provoked a debt crisis, and the country’s already existing problems of poverty became worse. Legal Mexican immigration to the United States increased rapidly, from a little over 621,000 in the decade 1970-79 to over 1 million in the 1980s. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) encouraged some unauthorized Mexican immigrants to remain by offering amnesty and encouraged others to move into the United States on a long-term basis by intensifying control of the border, making it more difficult to move back and forth. The extended time frame allowed many workers to seek work further north, away from the border. In 1994 a second economic shock, the devaluation of the peso, caused dramatic inflation and a decline in living standards. In response to the economic problems, over 2.75 million Mexicans legally immigrated to the United States during the 1990s, and from 2000 to 2005 the United States received an average of 200,000 legal permanent residents from Mexico every year.11

Undocumented migration showed the same trend, with the largest number
of undocumented immigrants arriving from Mexico, motivated both by the economic difficulties at home and by U.S. immigration enforcement activities after IRCA. The number of undocumented immigrants increased by 130,000 each year during the 1970s to an estimated 500,000 annually in the 1980s, and their numbers continued to go up in the following decades. Although many undocumented immigrants arrived by air, often as visitors who stayed after their visas expired, crossing the border from the south was the main method of entering the United States without legal permission. Consequently, these migrants entered the states bordering Mexico. Texas has become the primary access location for Mexicans and South Americans, both those remaining in Texas and those bound for other parts of the U.S. South. By 2005 Texas had an estimated 1,360,000 unauthorized immigrants, or 13 percent of all those in the country, a number second only to California.\(^1\)

The 2000 U.S. Census counted nearly three million immigrants in Texas and three-quarters of these were from Latin America (see Table 1). Just five years later, the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau estimated the state’s foreign-born population at over three and a half million. Mexicans made up over 60 percent of all immigrants in Texas in 2000 and 2005. During that same period, an estimated 6 to 7 percent of Texas immigrants were Central Americans. Most of the Central Americans had entered by way of Mexico, again highlighting the role of geographic access.\(^1\)

As a consequence of geographic access, Texas’s main immigrant population is Hispanic or Latino, yet Texas also has a substantial Asian minority (see Table 1), attributable to some extent to the general rise in Asian migration around the United States and to the booming economy in Texas cities such as Houston. In 2000 the Vietnamese were Texas’s single largest Asian immigrant group, accounting for one out of every four foreign-born Asian Texans, and the state had the second largest Vietnamese population in the United States, after California, with 12 percent of all Vietnamese in the United States.

The case of the Vietnamese illustrates the importance of Texas as a point of access even for members of these more distant national-origin groups. Initial U.S. government resettlement efforts in 1975 had planted Vietnamese communities in the cities of Dallas and Houston. Additional Vietnamese Americans were drawn to Texas by the existing ethnic communities, combined with the availability of jobs in that state. Shrimping became something of an ethnic specialty for Vietnamese Americans along the Gulf Coast of Texas and other states.\(^14\)

In recent times, Florida, the other geographic access state, has been the fourth largest national center of immigration in the United States. The state’s immigrant population may actually be much bigger than census statistics indicate; immigration officials believe that about 850,000 undocumented immigrants lived in Florida in 2005, making it the state with the third largest undocumented popula-
Table 1. Regions of Origin of Immigrants in the South and in the U.S., 2000 (Percent in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>North America</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Alabama</td>
<td>18,415</td>
<td>26,235</td>
<td>3,662</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>35,174</td>
<td>3,352</td>
<td>87,767</td>
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<td>(29.9)</td>
<td>(4.2)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(40.5)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>10,028</td>
<td>15,846</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>43,309</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>73,690</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13.6)</td>
<td>(21.5)</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td>(1.6)</td>
<td>(18.8)</td>
<td>(2.5)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>355,427</td>
<td>231,976</td>
<td>34,493</td>
<td>4,957</td>
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<td>100,158</td>
<td>2,670,794</td>
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<td>(13.3)</td>
<td>(8.7)</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td>(72.8)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>74,257</td>
<td>145,696</td>
<td>40,423</td>
<td>2,021</td>
<td>300,357</td>
<td>14,519</td>
<td>577,273</td>
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<tr>
<td>(12.9)</td>
<td>(23.2)</td>
<td>(7.0)</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(52.0)</td>
<td>(2.5)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>18,662</td>
<td>43,464</td>
<td>4,016</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>46,161</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>115,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15.6)</td>
<td>(37.5)</td>
<td>(3.5)</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>86,840</td>
<td>181,504</td>
<td>62,688</td>
<td>1,957</td>
<td>176,026</td>
<td>9,300</td>
<td>518,315</td>
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<tr>
<td>(16.8)</td>
<td>(35.0)</td>
<td>(12.1)</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(34.0)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>7,643</td>
<td>14,434</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>14,182</td>
<td>1,726</td>
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<td>(19.2)</td>
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<td>(3.2)</td>
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<td>(36.5)</td>
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<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>60,222</td>
<td>93,153</td>
<td>20,369</td>
<td>1,825</td>
<td>239,813</td>
<td>14,198</td>
<td>430,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>27,177</td>
<td>29,402</td>
<td>3,248</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>49,608</td>
<td>5,718</td>
<td>115,978</td>
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<td>(23.4)</td>
<td>(21.4)</td>
<td>(2.8)</td>
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<td>(42.8)</td>
<td>(4.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
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<td>8,866</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>63,484</td>
<td>7,194</td>
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<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(39.9)</td>
<td>(4.5)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
<td>152,327</td>
<td>466,218</td>
<td>64,470</td>
<td>6,984</td>
<td>2,172,476</td>
<td>37,163</td>
<td>2,899,640</td>
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<td>(16.1)</td>
<td>(2.2)</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td>(74.9)</td>
<td>(1.5)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>86,612</td>
<td>235,574</td>
<td>42,509</td>
<td>2,807</td>
<td>189,809</td>
<td>13,160</td>
<td>370,271</td>
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<td>(41.3)</td>
<td>(7.5)</td>
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<td>(33.3)</td>
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<td>U.S.</td>
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<td>8,364,026</td>
<td>819,147</td>
<td>180,308</td>
<td>15,471,784</td>
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<td>31,107,573</td>
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<td>(2.7)</td>
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As in Texas, Hispanics constitute about two-thirds of the immigrants. In the case of Florida, though, geographic access came by sea and air from the south. In 2000 about one-fourth of Florida immigrants had been born in Cuba, and 16 to 17 percent were from the rest of the Caribbean region. South Americans made up an additional 15 percent, with Central Americans and Mexicans trailing at 9 and 7 percents, respectively.14
Like the Irish and Mexican migrations, the Cuban influx had been stimulated by problems at home. The first wave came between 1959 and 1962, when about 215,000 middle- and upper-class Cubans began pouring into the United States in the early years of Fidel Castro’s revolutionary government. Following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, travel between the two countries became much more difficult; until 1965 only about 30,000 Cubans managed to leave the island for the United States. In the autumn of 1965, though, Castro invited his critics to leave the country, and President Lyndon B. Johnson responded by inviting them to find freedom in the United States. In this second wave, which lasted until 1973, 340,000 Cubans made their way to the United States. A final wave of Cuban refugees left the island in 1980 in the Mariel boatlifts, which brought more than 125,000 refugees from Cuba to the United States over a six-month period.  

Although Cuban migration had been limited since the Mariel era, Cubans are at present the largest single ethnic group in the state. In 2000 there were 846,080 Cubans in Florida, and by 2005 the number of Floridians identified as Cuban had reached over one million, or one out of every seventeen people in the state. In Miami, one-third of the residents were Cuban in the early twenty-first century.

The Spanish-speaking environment of southern Florida helped to create communities that attracted and often held people from the Caribbean and South
In 2000, 31 percent of all Colombians, the largest group of South American immigrants in the United States, were concentrated in Florida. Many of the South Americans, especially the numerous Colombians, were motivated to migrate by social unrest and violence in their homelands. The booming economy of Florida, in part created by Cuban ethnic enterprise, both attracted immigrants and encouraged them to remain.18

In 1970 Georgia, at the forefront of the economic opportunity states, was home to 32,988 immigrants, who made up less than 1 percent of the state’s population. Ten years later, this number had increased to 91,480, or slightly fewer than 2 percent of the population, and by 1990 to 173,126 immigrants, or nearly 3 percent of the population. By 2000 this number increased more than three-fold during the 1990s, reaching 577,273, or 7 percent of the state’s population (see Table 1). This remarkable growth continued into the new century, reaching an estimated 795,000, or 9 percent of the population, by 2005. By that year, Georgia was seventh in the nation in undocumented immigrants, with an estimated 470,000 foreign-born individuals without proper papers living in the state.19

The majority of the new population has been Hispanic, with Mexicans making up the largest part of Georgia’s recent immigration boom. In the early 2000s, about one-third of all the state’s foreign-born people came from Mexico. Central Americans placed a distant second, accounting for 6 to 7 percent, followed by the Caribbean, with 5 to 6 percent.20

This rapid growth in Mexican immigrant laborers can be traced to an increase in the supply of workers from the south and in the demand for workers in Georgia’s industry. As Mexico’s economic problems in the 1980s and 1990s encouraged more people to look for work north of the border, the newcomers began to look further than the border states. By 2000 the most common industrial concentrations of Mexicans in Georgia were construction (34 percent of Mexican workers), agriculture (8 percent), carpets and rugs (6 percent), and meat products (5 percent). The last two were new industries in Georgia that had acquired dominant positions in the national and world economy.21

In the 1970s and 1980s, the American meat-processing industry became more consolidated and began moving out of urban to more rural areas. Skill requirements fell in these highly mechanized, large-scale meat-processing plants, and the industry began to hire more immigrants, with the proportion of immigrants rising from 8 percent of workers in 1980 to 33 percent in 2000. During the 1970s, Gainesville, in north Georgia, became known as “the Poultry Capital of the World,” processing chicken meat for shipping to national and global markets. The first Mexican workers began arriving in northern Georgia in the 1970s, estab-
lishing a basis for network support and communication for future arrivals. Their numbers began to take off during the 1980s, as more Mexican workers moved north looking for work and work became increasingly available in processing. By the 1990s the Spanish-speaking population of the small town of Gainesville, with an official total population in 1990 of 17,885, may have numbered as many as 30,000.22

During the 1950s and 1960s, northeast textile and carpet manufacturing businesses, which had begun to relocate to the South as early as the 1920s, drawn by the competitive advantages of the South’s lower wages, established a rapidly increasing presence in northwest Georgia. This area, particularly the town of Dalton, emerged as a center of this industry, producing 80 percent of all the carpet in the United States by the late 1990s. Mexican workers who had come to work in north Georgia’s poultry industry in the mid-1980s found other regional opportunities, including the carpet industry. Other Mexican immigrants, pushed further north by a slowdown in the Texas building industry, as well as by the longer-term orientation created by American immigration policy, came to the area. Perceptions of a labor shortage among carpet manufacturing employers in this small town combined with the relatively low wages that new Mexican immigrants would accept made the new arrivals attractive to employers, and Mexicans moved into the industry on a large scale during the 1990s. From 1990 to 2000, the Hispanic portion of Dalton’s population grew from under 7 to over 40 percent.23

Along with the development of new industries, agriculture, particularly in the form of large-scale agribusiness, continues to be an important economic activity in Georgia, particularly in the south. Ninety percent of the state’s symbolic peaches are produced by five growers in Fruit County. In addition, bell peppers, lima beans, pole beans, southern peas, sweet corn, and tomatoes are important crops. During the 1980s, growers increasingly began to draw on Mexican labor for the low-paying but necessary work of planting and harvesting. By 2000 about one out of every twelve Mexicans in the Georgia labor force was in agriculture.24

Although Georgia’s new industries and agriculture provided jobs that attracted immigrants moving up from the border states, the dynamo of Atlanta was the greatest source of economic opportunity for the state’s immigrants, including the Hispanic population. In 1990 metropolitan Atlanta had a total population of 2,833,511 and an immigrant population of 115,642. Ten years later, greater Atlanta’s population had grown to 4,112,198 and its immigrants had increased to 423,105, or nearly three quarters of all the immigrants in the state. Of these new arrivals, 170,510 had entered the United States between 1995 and 2000. Seventy percent of the state’s foreign-born Asians and 57 percent of its Hispanic population lived in metropolitan Georgia in 2000. While men and women made up roughly equal portions of Asian immigrants, men outnumbered women by more than ten to one among Hispanics immigrants. The Hispanic newcomers who had
come north, mainly from Texas, were mostly men either single or traveling without their families, who were attracted to the availability of blue-collar jobs created by the Atlanta economy. Nearly 40 percent of Atlanta’s Mexicans were in construction (up from 33 percent in the state in general), providing the labor to build the rapidly growing city. Another 12 percent were in manufacturing.\(^3\)

As a world center, Atlanta has attracted a diverse Asian population. The largest grouping of Atlanta’s Asians in 2000 consisted of people from the South Asian subcontinent, with just under 36,000 Asian Indians, over 1,000 Bangladeshis, and well over 3,000 Pakistanis. At that time, Atlanta was also home to nearly 25,000 Vietnamese, close to 22,000 Koreans, and just under 21,500 Chinese. Largely members of an educated work force, the South Asian migrants were drawn to this international-airport-hub city by its professional, white-collar opportunities in professional, scientific, and technical industries, which in 2000 employed one in five of the Asian Indians in the metropolis.

As in Texas, the Vietnamese first came to Atlanta as part of government resettlement efforts, and the initial Vietnamese communities provided bases for secondary migration from other parts of the country while Vietnamese job seekers looked for work. They found it in the blue-collar sector, with nearly one-third of Atlanta Vietnamese occupied in the city’s manufacturing industry in 2000. Koreans, as in New York and Los Angeles, became the small shopkeepers of Greater Atlanta, with about 22 percent of Koreans in retail trade. Chinese, like the South Asians, had often come with educational credentials to seek jobs in professional, scientific, and technical fields, which held 17 percent of the area’s Chinese work-
ers. Other Chinese migrants tended to go in to restaurant and related work, as accommodations and food services held 16 percent of the city’s Chinese workers. A diversified metropolitan economy with global connections had pulled in workers from all over the world into a mosaic of national-origin specializations.

North Carolina shares many of the characteristics of Georgia, without having an urban center to parallel Atlanta. In 2000 Mexicans made up 75 percent of North Carolina’s Hispanic immigrants, and Central Americans, who had presumably almost all entered the United States through Mexico, made up another 15 percent. By 2005 North Carolina was ninth in the nation in undocumented immigrants, with an estimated 350,000, which means that the actual number of Hispanics in the state may have been much greater than indicated by census statistics. As in Georgia, the most common industrial concentration for Hispanic workers in 2000 was construction, which employed 26 percent of them. Another 11 percent were employed in agriculture.26

By 2005 North Carolina employed a greater proportion of Hispanic immigrants in agriculture than did Georgia because of the large number of construction jobs in the booming region of Atlanta. However, North Carolina did have its own rapidly growing Sunbelt-economy cities, providing employment for new arrivals. In North Carolina, as in Georgia, Hispanic construction workers tended to be found in the larger cities, particularly in Charlotte (which, with over 40,000 Hispanics, had the largest number in the state), Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Durham, and Greensboro.27

Farming is important in North Carolina, placing it eighth in the nation in total agricultural income. In the past, African Americans did most of the state’s low-paid, seasonal work demanded by agriculture, but the increasing availability of workers moving northward from Mexico made them an appealing source of labor. By the 1990s North Carolina, which was fifth in the United States in numbers of migrant workers, drew nine out of ten of its farm workers from the ranks of the Hispanics.28

North Carolina is not normally thought of as a center of the American South Asian population. Nevertheless, over 25,000 Asian Indians lived in the state in 2000, about 20,000 of whom were foreign-born. The North Carolina Asian Indians tended to be an urban population: 40 percent were located in the cities of Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham, or Greensboro, and one out of every four Asian Indians in North Carolina lived in the metropolitan area of Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill. These largely urban immigrants were, as elsewhere in the South, concentrated in professional fields: 18 percent of employed Asian Indians in North Carolina were in professional, technical, and scientific industries, and another 19 percent were in educational, health, and social services fields.29

The 18,100 Chinese and 12,400 Koreans in North Carolina were also part of the urban landscape, with one out of five of the former and one out of four of the
latter living in the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill metropolis in 2000. The Chinese were most heavily concentrated in professional fields and food services, while Koreans tended to be in retail trade or professional, scientific, and technical areas. The wake of the Vietnam War had brought a fairly large Southeast Asian population to North Carolina, with 15,600 Vietnamese, 7,000 Hmong, 5,000 Lao, and 2,300 Cambodians living in the state in 2000.\(^5\)

Virginia and Maryland shared in a cluster of service and professional industries heavily concentrated in the highly populated area around the District of Columbia. Virginia was close to Georgia in total numbers of immigrants in 2000, but had a much higher proportion of Asian immigrants (see Table 1). Virginia’s Fairfax County, part of the D.C. area, held 42 percent of the state’s immigrants in 2000 and immigrants made up one fourth of the county population. The two D.C.-area counties of Prince George’s and Montgomery contained two-thirds of Maryland’s immigrant population, and immigrants made up 14 percent of the people in Prince George’s and over one-fourth of the people in Montgomery.\(^5\)

The service and professional industry character of many of the job opportunities in these two states helps to explain why there were more Asian immigrants in each, proportionately and in numbers, than there were in Georgia. Virginia’s largest Asian group, Asian Indians (47,500 in 2000), were represented most heavily in professional, scientific, and technical fields, which employed one-fourth of them, followed by retail trade, educational health and social services, and accommodations and food services (largely the hotel/motel industry). Chinese people in Virginia, the second largest Asian group (35,500 in 2000), tended to be most concentrated in accommodations and food services, and then in professional,

The first wave of large-scale Cuban migration to Florida occurred when middle and upper-class Cubans began pouring into the United States in the early years of Fidel Castro’s revolutionary government. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, travel between Cuba and the United States became much more difficult. President John F. Kennedy and advisors on the West Wing Colonnade after the crisis’s EXCOMM Meeting on October 29, 1962. Left to right: Special Assistant McGeorge Bundy, President Kennedy, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Photograph by White House photographer Cecil Stoughton, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
scientific, and technical fields. Maryland looked similar to Virginia in numbers of Asian Indians (49,800) and Chinese (49,500) and in industrial concentrations. Southeast Asians, especially Vietnamese, tended to be located more in Virginia than in Maryland in 2000. The former was home to 35,400 Vietnamese and the latter to 16,700. Again, the Southeast Asians had originally settled in the area as a result of the U.S. Government refugee program and had remained because of the existence of ethnic communities and job opportunities. The Vietnamese in this region were employed most often in manufacturing or retail trade, but by 2000 many were also in the area’s plentiful professional, technical, and scientific occupations.

As elsewhere, Hispanics were most often in construction, which employed 17 percent of them in Virginia and 18 percent in Maryland. This was particularly true for the largest Hispanic group, Mexicans. In both states, one in five Mexicans was in construction.

LIMITED MIGRATION STATES

The states of the Deep South, Arkansas, and Tennessee still tended to attract fewer immigrants than the rest of the country at the turn of the last century. James R. Elliott and Marcel Ionescu, sociologists at Tulane University, attributed the limited migration to the “Deep South triad” of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to their relatively stagnant economies, pointing out that they contained some of the slowest growing metropolitan areas in the country. All of the limited migration states also showed low median household incomes. Mississippi, with the least immigration among the southern states, also had the lowest household median income in the 2000 U.S. Census, at $31,350.

Louisiana had largely lost its centrality as a place of entry into the United States by the twentieth century, with the port of New Orleans steadily losing ground to other ports and to forms of transportation and communication other than the sea. By the late twentieth century, then, the Deep South had not been pulled as deeply into the global movement of people because it offered neither access nor opportunity on the same scale as the other southern states. However, although slower to develop international connections than other areas, Arkansas and the lower South did participate in the overall increase in immigration that affected the rest of the country.

The Asian population, especially the Southeast Asian population, was an early immigrant group in these states. Louisiana, in particular, had a fairly large Asian population, with over 43,000 individuals in 2000. The Vietnamese were particularly concentrated along the Gulf Coast region of Louisiana and Mississippi because of the relative abundance of economic opportunities afforded by cities such as New Orleans and Biloxi. In both states, about one out of every ten Vietnamese
men in 2000 was employed in agriculture and fishing, primarily in shrimping and fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.34

South Carolina, with the largest recorded Hispanic population among the limited migration states in 2000, employed one out of five Hispanic workers in construction and another one out of five in manufacturing. The industrial concentration of Hispanics, then, is similar to that found in other areas of the South, and the movement of Latino immigrant workers to South Carolina can be expected to increase as jobs in construction and manufacturing increase.35

Louisiana had a reported Hispanic immigrant population of 46,561 in 2000 (see Table 1). The number of Hispanic immigrants entering the state from Texas increased during the 1990s in response to a demand for labor in oil-related construction, particularly in shipbuilding and ship repair, in the southwestern part of the state, with companies in the areas of Morgan City and Houma-Thibodeaux recruiting the abundant skilled and semi-skilled construction labor available in south Texas.36

In 1990s Mississippi and Alabama, Hispanic workers moved into the Gulf Coast area to work in jobs in casino construction and forestry. Although small in absolute size and relative ranking, the foreign-born populations in Alabama and Mississippi approximately doubled and experienced a higher rate of growth than did the nation as a whole during the 1990s. Louisiana, on the other hand, experienced a slower pace of growth (32.6 percent increase), leading to a substantial drop in its foreign-born state ranking, from twenty-sixth in 1990 to nineteenth in 2000.37

The big boom in Hispanic migration to the Central Gulf Coast followed Hurricane Katrina in the Fall of 2005, with an estimated 100,000 Hispanic workers moving into the region. In the days after the hurricane, President George W. Bush temporarily suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which guarantees construction workers the prevailing local wage when paid with federal money. The Hispanic population of New Orleans is believed to have increased by 4,000 people as a result of the influx of disaster restoration workers; that of neighboring Jefferson Parish had increased by 6,000, so that by early 2007 one out of ten people in both New Orleans and Jefferson Parish were Hispanic. Many had come straight from Texas, but others had entered the country earlier through Texas or another border access state and then migrated to the Gulf Coast.38

In short, the hurricane had created a demand for exactly the type of work that was already an ethnic specialization for Mexican and Central American job seekers: construction. The southern-most part of the Deep South triad became a new setting for economic demand that was bringing it more closely into the global system of labor exchange.

Arkansas and Tennessee had seen rapid growth in their Hispanic populations over the course of the 1990s. Arkansas’s total Hispanic population, native and
foreign born, had grown from 19,586 in 1990 to 43,309 in 2000, with Mexicans constituting over 70 percent of the state’s Hispanics. The native-born and immigrant Hispanic population of Tennessee had grown from 51,075 to 63,484 during that same period, according to U.S. Census estimates. This remarkable increase (see Table 1) was due to jobs available in the poultry industry and to construction jobs.

During the twentieth century the United States as a whole became more closely integrated in global interconnections, and the southern part of the nation became a more vibrant part of the American economy. These two historical developments have stimulated the driving forces of economic opportunity, transportation, communication, and concentrations of settlement in the South. Most of the increase in immigration to the South, as well as to other parts of the country, has been due to the rapid growth of Asian and Hispanic newcomers. Asians have come to the United States because of the growing links between the United States and Asia. American military intervention in Southeast Asia, and the refugee movements that followed that intervention, played a large part in creating Asian communities throughout the United States. As we have seen, this was the source of several of the largest Asian communities in southern states, particularly in the states along Louisiana, with the largest port in the South and the second largest in the nation, was a major center of immigration in the nineteenth century. The state already had lost its distinction as a place of entry into the country by the twentieth century, when World War II Federal Art Project posters were warning of the need for port security. Courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.
the Gulf Coast. However, even those settlements that had their origins in government-sponsored refugee programs continued and grew because of the existence of economic opportunity.

In the South, as well as in the United States as a whole, Hispanics constituted the largest numbers of immigrants. In part, this has been due to access, and the largest Hispanic centers in the South have emerged in Texas and Florida because of the geographic location of these states. Again, however, opportunity has been a key issue, since immigrants seek access because of relative disadvantages in their original homelands and relative advantages in their destinations. Moreover, these access states would not have retained immigrants if jobs had not been available.

Movement into the access states has been part of a chain of historical events. For Texas, these events go back to the early part of the century, so that the new migration should be seen as the latest manifestation of historic links between events south of the border and movement across the border. For Florida, most of the historic events are more recent, although there is a long-standing connection between Florida and the nations of the Caribbean. Throughout the South, growing industries have pulled in immigrants, primarily into the opportunity states, but also into states that are slower in entering the global labor market.

NOTES


5. Statistics in this paragraph are drawn from Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series."


7. The data on Mexican immigration to Texas are derived from Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

17. The estimate of one-third of the Miami population comes from Alex Stepick, Guillermo Grenier, Max Castro, and Marvin Dunn. *This Land Is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami* (University of California Press, 2003), 35.

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